

## **Nepal: A strategy for gender integration in a forestry project**

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***Theme: The Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project in Nepal illustrates a systematic effort to integrate gender into a development project.***

Forestry departments and forestry activities around the world tend to be male preserves. Nepal is no exception. But, as shown by a 2002 study, the IFAD-financed Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project (HLFFDP) successfully challenged the normal way of doing things. Both men and women were active in the gender mainstreaming strategy.

The implementation of the innovative HLFFDP began in 1993. The project had two related objectives: (1) to contribute to the improvement of the ecological conditions in the hills and (2) to raise the incomes of families in the hills who were living below the poverty line. These objectives were to be achieved through the lease of areas of degraded forest lands to poor households, which would also be assisted in the regeneration of the land. The design of the project singled out poor woman-headed households as one of the key target groups. The project also had a third objective, which was more explicitly highlighted: gender. Specifically, the project was “to integrate gender and disadvantaged (ethnic) group issues and considerations in the leasehold forestry and forage development approach and its implementation.”

This third objective may well have remained “on the wish list” had it not been for the courage of the project comanagers. These two men were convinced by their early project experience that there were constraints on women’s participation, including the participation of women in the benefits. In 1999, with the help of a grant from the Government of the Netherlands, a team of three Nepalese women technical assistants were added to the project coordination unit. This “gender team” was instructed to develop mechanisms to mainstream gender issues into the project. The women team members were not foresters, but were familiar with forestry issues. The senior-most woman had acted as a gender trainer and facilitator with the Department of Forest Research and Survey and was respected for her ability to walk and work in remote areas. With their hiring, the project coordination unit became gender balanced, with 50% men and 50% women professionals, in spite of the fact that the line agency remained heavily dominated by men. Initially, the team was distrusted by the district forest officers.

The workplan of the gender team was conceived at three levels: the grass roots, the district and policy. The final team focus was mainly on the recruitment and development of a cadre of women group promoters throughout the project area. These group promoters were to mobilize rural women to participate in the leasehold groups. The approach already existed within the project through a policy of hiring women, but the number was increased through the hiring of 30 more local women as group promoters. Thanks to the initiative of a male colleague responsible for livestock, the gender team also built up a separate, but similar group of female livestock-promoters. The strategy was to deliver gender sensitivity training to men and women leasehold forestry group members through these two types of promoters. The gender team provided continual gender and leadership training to the group promoters through an initial training session, followed by refresher

courses every six months. The quality of the curriculum and of the trainers was high. The women trainees who were most active in the training programme were invited to become trainers.

The group promoters were also urged to develop a sense of solidarity and to encourage and depend on one another for support, a behaviour modelled on the women in the gender team. The gender team also set up a support system of “gender focal persons”, mainly male technical staff, among the line agencies collaborating in the project. These included the Department of Forest Research and Survey, the Department of Livestock Services, the Agricultural Development Bank Nepal and the Nepal Agricultural Research Council. The gender team developed the gender awareness and skills of the focal persons through training, coaching and guidance. Networking was also encouraged, and communication media, such as magazines, were created to exchange information among gender focal persons in the technical agencies. A magazine was also created to help empower group promoters at the grass-roots level. The magazine boldly discussed the position of women and women’s rights.

Recently, IFAD conducted a study of the gender mainstreaming strategy of the HLFFDP. The study underlines a number of elements that were key to the success of the gender strategy. Among these were:

- supportive project management;
- the experience, commitment and spirit of the gender team;
- the autonomy of the grant-funded gender component and team, which freed them from many government regulations and constraints and permitted innovation;
- the motivation of and the support system established for the gender field staff;
- the interdependent work of the gender staff and the line agency staff;
- the high quality of the gender activities and the staff; and
- the complete integration of gender activities with other project components.

In other words, the gender mainstreaming strategy of the HLFFDP was a multi-faceted and intensive one. It focused on the sensitization of and change in gender attitudes and behaviours among both men and women and the empowerment of women so that they could gain better access to project resources and have more control over their own lives.

*Lessons: This experience suggests several lessons. One is that men can be active participants in a strategy of gender mainstreaming. A second is that, in a difficult situation, it is particularly important to build a strong support system for social and institutional change. A third relates to the importance of the support of project management, without which, the Nepal HLFFDP initiative could not have taken place.*

**Main source:**

**IFAD Technical Advisory Division, 2002, Jeannette Gurung with Kanchan Lama, Empowered Women and the Men behind Them: A Study of Change within the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project in Nepal, Rome: IFAD, April.**